

Message Text

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64

ACTION SS-30

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R 171235Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4220

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

S E C R E T TUNIS 303

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS

SUBJ: FRENCH AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON PRESIDENT

BOURGUIBA

1. FRENCH AMBASSADOR GEORGES GAUCHER TOLD ME THAT HIS CALL ON PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA JANUARY 14, IMMEDIATELY AFTER MY CALL ON PRESIDENT, PROVIDED HIM INSIGHT INTO MASMOUDI-PRIME MINISTER STRUGGLE. HE SAID MASMOUDI HAPPENED TO BE AT PALACE TO ACCOMPANY MAURETANIAN VISITOR IN CALL ON PRESIDENT AND SINCE HE WAS THERE, HE SAT IN ON GAUCHER'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT. EVIDENTLY MOST OF CONVERSATION OCCURRED BETWEEN PRESIDENT AND MASMOUDI (IN FRONT OF GAUCHER) AND CONSISTED ESSENTIALLY OF DEBATE ON MERITS AND DEMERITS OF TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER. BOURGUIBA OBVIOUSLY WAS BEGINNING HAVE DOUBTS AND MANIFESTED THESE DOUBTS OUT LOUD.

2. DURING MEETING PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA CALLED ON TELEPHONE AND PRESIDENT SPOKE WITH HIM IN ARABIC (WHICH GAUCHER DOES NOT RPT NOT UNDERSTAND). HOWEVER, OBVIOUSLY CONVERSATION CONCERNED UNION AND MASMOUDI KEPT PROMPTING PRESIDENT IN FRENCH TO PROCEED AS PLANNED. IT SEEMS THAT AMONG SUBJECTS PRIME MINISTER RAISED ON TELEPHONE WAS PROBLEM OF REFERENDUM -- TUNISIAN CONSTITUTION HAS NO PROVISION FOR REFERENDUM.

SECRET

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3. MASMOUDI'S LINE TO PRESIDENT BOTH DURING HIS PROMPTING, WHILE PRESIDENT ON TELEPHONE WITH PRIME MINISTER, AND DURING REST OF MEETING WAS:"MR. PRESIDENT, THIS IS GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU. YOU WILL BE THE GREAT LEADER

OF A LARGE AND POWERFUL UNION. THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT
HISTORICAL EVENT. THINK OF PRESIDENT DEGAULLE -- HE
WOULD HAVE GRASPED THIS HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY DESPITE
ALL THE DIFFICULTIES AND MADE IT WORK."

4. GAUCHER SAID THAT HE ALSO SENSED THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS
SLIPPED AND, AS IN MY CASE, FOUND HIS MEETING WITH
THE PRESIDENT SOMEWHAT EMMBARRASSING.
SEELYE

SECRET

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